

Amendment Act, and I am encouraged that Members of both parties see the need for this legislation.

As a country, we have made incredible progress in expanding the right to vote to previously disenfranchised populations. Now is not the time to turn the clock back. We should, instead, be moving forward, ever forward, and encouraging legal, eligible voters to fully participate in their government, in democracy, and in voting—not working to exclude them.

Congress must commit to passing the Voting Rights Amendment Act and ensuring that the ballot boxes in our States, in our Nation, and in our democracy remain open to all.

CENTRAL ALABAMA VETERANS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with this Congress and with this Nation a story of mismanagement, malfeasance, negligence, and coverup at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System, or CAVHCS.

I know most of my colleagues can point to at least some problems at the VA systems in their State. But what has transpired in my hometown of Montgomery, Alabama, and central Alabama rises to a level of misconduct and mistrust I am not sure many other systems can match. And I do this not simply just to disparage the system for no reason. I do this to shine a light on some truly disturbing practices so we can finally clean up the mess. I do this so that the 50,000-plus veterans that depend on the Central Alabama VA can one day have confidence in the health care system we promised them.

After Phoenix, when the scheduling scheme began to unravel, it was revealed in early June that the Central Alabama VA had one of the worst wait times in the country. It was particularly bad for mental health patients.

I actually met with our local VA director, who acknowledged the discrepancies and tried to reassure me by leading me to believe that action had been taken to remove those responsible. It turns out that wasn't true. No one was fired. Mr. Speaker, if a Member of Congress can't get a straight answer from the VA, imagine what our veterans go through every single day.

In the wake of this clear breach of trust, we began digging deeper to find out what was really going on at the Central Alabama VA. The information that we received from sources who came forward was alarming. It is also consistent with reports gathered by independent inspectors and some great investigative reporters.

Here is what is being uncovered:

A Montgomery VA pulmonologist manipulated more than 1,200 patient records to show tests that never occurred. After being caught, the doctor was never fired or suspended. He actu-

ally was caught manipulating records again but somehow went on to receive a "satisfactory" performance review;

At least 900 unread patient X-ray tests, many showing malignancies, were lost over a 5-year period. When the tests were discovered recently, top hospital administrators tried to cover up the problem;

Email records show the Central Alabama VA director was alerted to the concerns over patient scheduling practices more than 8 months before taking action;

And finally, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the strongest evidence yet has emerged that the rampant scheduling manipulation at Central Alabama wasn't a misunderstanding at all but, rather, a facility-led standard operating procedure. More than 57 percent of staff surveyed at Central Alabama said they received "instruction" to manipulate patient wait times, 57 percent. Mr. Speaker, that is off the charts. The national average is 12.7 percent, and other systems near Montgomery aren't even close.

There is clearly a systematic problem in Montgomery, and it needs to be corrected. That is why I have joined with Senator RICHARD SHELBY to write the new Secretary of Veterans Administration, Robert McDonald, to call his attention to the Central Alabama VA. Specifically, Senator SHELBY and I are asking Secretary McDonald to review these instances of mismanagement, visit CAVHCS with us, and develop a plan of action to reform the Central Alabama system.

It is so important to remember that thousands of doctors, nurses, and public servants at the VA work very hard every day to give veteran patients the best health care that we can offer. Their service is honorable, and it is a shame that it is overshadowed now by a system that too often fails those it was created to help.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot allow the American people to forget about this. We cannot allow the news media to move on to the next story. I hear from veterans every day who are depending on us to make this right. This will be an uphill battle. I know that. But it is a fight we have to fight. We have to change this culture of complacency. That starts with new leadership, and I look forward to working with Secretary McDonald.

THE BORDER CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of weeks, many of us have visited my home State and have gone to places where I have gone over the decades of service and living in Texas, and that is to our great neighbors who live on the border. Many great citizens of the State of Texas and of the great country in which we live, they have lived and worked and played,

and they have created an economic engine, cities like Brownsville, Laredo, Harlingen, McAllen, and many others. And they have, in fact, experienced over the years an influx of individuals coming to do harm.

As a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and a member who has served as chairwoman and ranking member on a number of subcommittees, we have made great strides.

I am reminded of the low number of Border Patrol agents some many years ago, and now we are upwards to 25,000 hardworking Americans who serve on both the northern and southern borders.

They have met the challenge of a serious influx. First, the drug cartels. The violence on the Mexican side of the border. We have come together with Mexican Presidents and have worked with the Mexican national defense forces, and we have quashed, to a certain extent, the extensive violence. But yet, our Federal agents of the ATF, the DEA, FBI, and certainly other collaborative efforts have worked to bring this violence down.

We take note of the fact that El Paso is noted as the safest city in the United States, and it is on the border. We note that a great deal of commerce comes through the southern border, as it does the northern border.

Over the last couple of weeks, beginning maybe in 2013, we saw a new phenomenon, an unplanned phenomenon, a phenomenon driven by the devastating and destructive elements found in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Central America, none of which were driven by a pointed pronouncement from the United States or the President of the United States, President Barack Obama. But elements who wanted to misuse and abuse the need for comprehensive immigration reform decided to misrepresent the laws of the United States of America.

Every Member of Congress has adhered to a particular theme. I started using it in the 1990s. We are a Nation of laws and a Nation of immigrants. And the laws are intended to be used to instruct how we guide our hearts and our laws. We still have the Statue of Liberty in the harbor of New York that says, we welcome the forlorn and those who are in need.

Unfortunately, bad information was given to desperate people. Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker: desperate people. Desperate mothers and fathers who saw the beheading of young people, or people in their neighborhood threatened by MS-13 and other horrific gangs who say, if your child does not join, your child will be killed, or your little girl will be raped. Or maybe the 3-year-old that I saw down in Brownsville with a diaper on was given to someone just to save her life.

That is the misnomer and the abuse that has been going on in the debate